Political Protest and Metaphor

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This paper explores the use of metaphors, particularly the gendered divide, in narratives structuring the understanding of political protest. Two separate events from Swedish politics will serve as examples when analysing how metaphors structure language and meaning, and how political protests are identified as a result of discourse, and subjected to hegemonic intervention (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Zizek, 1990). One event studied is the alternative globalisation movement’s demonstrations at the EU summit in Gothenburg 2001. A recurring coherent structuring metaphor characterising the demonstrations expressed the protests as some type of living organism, PROTEST AS AN ANIMAL/A NATURAL PHENOMENON (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In this narration, a particular group of alleged deviant activists were often referred to as a ‘tail’, which was unambiguously attached to a non-pronounced animal’s body – the normal demonstrators. DEMONSTRATION IS WAR was another widespread coherent structuring metaphor subjecting the alternative globalisation activists in Gothenburg to otherness. These metaphors are so obvious and established that protest becomes very similar to war in the discourse. The metonymic relation between violence, masculinity and protest becomes apparent in elite discourses and media reports on street-demonstrations. Women are notably absent as subjects in the discourse structuring collective protests taking to the streets, but are more visible in my second case-study, where a majority of the Swedish electorate voted against introducing the Euro as currency in 2003. Both events result in a social myth, however, impossible to suture as the contingency can always be reactivated. Studying metaphor in political science is eventually found to be useful and important. As there is no way to communicate or attain meaning without metaphors, the incitement to analyse the same remains imperative.

Metaphor and Discourse

Metaphors are, simply put, the application of alien names by transference (Aristoteles & Heath, 1996).¹ Metaphors are further also said to be the language of poetry, where words are used in ambiguous ways, or abused, not found in their ‘proper’ place. The following analysis is made possible through what can be called a rhetorical tropological ontology, where society

¹ The Greek word metaphor is in fact also the word for physical transport, as for example in public transportation. The words are thus transported from one place to another.
is regarded as made up by unstable symbolic relations not possible to settle. Sigmund Freud’s writings on the interpretation of dreams where the condensation (metaphor) and displacement (metonymy) never ceases can here be used as an analogy to meaning and language in general. The interpretation of the manifest dream into dream-thoughts cannot ever be fully exhausted (Freud, Robertson, & Crick, 1999), just like each sign in language is certain to find ever new applications. For Nietzsche there is no natural link between the thing in itself, ideas and what signifies this. The relationship between language and thought can never be pure according to this view and is always constituted by blatant metaphors, from the nerve-stimuli we call perception to the sound-image, and then, to that what we call cognition (Nietzsche & Breazeale, 1979). Nevertheless, communication would not be possible without metaphors. Although they are sweeping simplifications we must use these arbitrary representations to interpret an ever-changing world. In this study I will refrain from ontologically conceptualizing language as proper versus figurative, ordinary language versus strange language, and further, order of language and transgression, because this proposes language as already constituted. As articulated by Paul Ricoeur:

Certainly, the only functioning of language we are aware of operates within an already constituted order; metaphor does not produce a new order except by creating rifts in an old order. Nevertheless, could we not imagine that the order itself is born in the same way that it changes? Is there not in Gadamer’s terms, a ‘metaphoric’ at work at the origin of logical thought, at the root of all classification? (Ricoeur, 1977)

In this way the metaphor in the Aristotelian sense is always already a metaphor. Some metaphors reign for a moment, enlighten a conversation, but are suddenly away the next, others are forgotten as such and thus stay, and are taken as our given world, eternal truths, pure Language, direct thoughts or simply commonsense.

In spite of the undetermined nature of language and meaning, or rather, precisely because of that, metaphor as the object of research becomes of critical importance for studies in politics. Since political meaning is conveyed through the use of language and metaphor, the attempt of scrutinising the same is greatly needed. In analysing politics we can do nothing but (strategically) believe our self-deceptive use of metaphor, but nevertheless remember to not forget what they are. In the practical endeavour of such prospect I will make use of discourse theory inspired by the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) and Slavoj Žižek (Zizek, 1989, 1990) plus an interpretation of the “metaphors we live by” through a reading of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980). While using the structuring metaphors

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2 The relational functioning of language can be traced from Ferdinand De Saussure’s work on structural linguistics (Saussure, Sechehaye, & Bally, 1960).
as stipulated by Lakoff and Johnsson one needs to be aware of the essentialist cognitivism suggested by the two, as it does not routinely harmonize with discourse theory (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). However without succumbing to their ontology metaphors can be treated as structuring our entire thinking, although contingent and bound by locality, both in terms of time and space. Discourse is here viewed as every articulation maintaining it, besides through language also by institutional arrangements, pictures or humour. It is the structuring of a certain body of articulations supporting an illusionary wholeness where elements are reduced to moments. The discourse is a signifying system constituted by signs that can be related to one another through the logics of difference and equivalence (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Discourses hence function metaphorically.3

The Study of Political Metaphor and Protest

In this particular study of political metaphors I want to centre attention to the constitution of political protest. Political subjects do not exist in themselves as ready-made entities, but are instead the result of a temporary fixation made meaningful. The purpose is thus to demonstrate the inherently political character of the social, the structure where political protests are identified and recognized. In a western liberal democracy the most institutionalised and accepted form of political protest is casting a vote in a sanctioned election. Illegal direct action would be located on the opposite end on an imagined, simplified and formalized scale.4 Viewing the means for protest as a continuum in between these opposites then comes street-demonstrations or labour-strikes, which are considered healthy expressions of public opinion, but can occasionally turn ‘extreme’. However, the meaning of the protests is negotiable, and certain subjects and gestures become more legitimate, or even plausible and ‘real’ than others. In this study I attempt to examine metaphors, in the form of social practises and representations that structure events of protest. A group of political activists does not exist as such prior to their representation. They are constituted, embodied, the moment they are represented, either by themselves or others, spoken to or on behalf of (Laclau, 1993). Hence the political actor is a metaphor condensed with meaning. Simultaneous to the representation of a differential group identity, here, the protestors’, an

3 Genre is a subordinated category in this analysis. Here instead broad cultural conventions are of interest and not merely contextualisation represented by one genre (see Lundberg, 2001:66; Strandbrink, 1999:50). Any text material, whether feature stories, government reports or broadcasted debates, will thus be handled the same way, that is to say, as articulations of discourse.

4 But whether or not a protest is considered legitimate can vary also among those using unlawful means for protest, depending on who is carrying the political message and its perceived content. Under certain conditions of possibility an occupation may succeed even though formally regarded as a criminal activity (Fridolfsson, 2005).
entire account of the social emerges, since groups are constituted in relation to a whole, the context (Laclau, 1996).

Two events from contemporary Swedish politics will be the focus of my study on how political protest is constructed in various ways and how subjects are taking political action. They are not to be seen as comparative case studies, but instead as unique proceedings that are analysed because of their specific conditions. Particular attention will be drawn to the use of metaphors. The first event studied is the alternative globalisation movement’s demonstrations at the EU summit in Gothenburg 2001. The second analysis focuses on a consultative referendum about the introduction of the Euro as currency instead of the Swedish Krona in September 2003.

These events, in Laclau and Mouffes terminology dislocations (1985), do not have an inherent or essential meaning in themselves. Instead a discourse structuring an event is a fantasy about a present coherence and order, concealing the inherent lack in the social. These narratives are hegemonic interventions, symbolic condensations taking place in undecidable terrains; and they are political in the sense that they are the result of a power struggle. The hegemony is the new fixation of meaning and the exclusion of all others possible. The way in how the political community is constituted as an unproblematic whole, where events of protest within are granted a certain meaning, is ideological, i.e. “[t]he believe that there is a particular social arrangement which can bring about the closure and transparency of the community” (Laclau, 1996:206). My intent is to reactivate the contingency of these hegemonic narratives, but also to pinpoint possible effects triggered by the metaphors brought to play when characterising political protest and the subjects taking action within the hegemonic account of the social.

Event One – a Demonstration in Gothenburg

Sweden had the summer of 2001 been holding the presidency of the European Union, which was to be culminating in a summit in the city of Gothenburg, where leaders from Europe and the president of the United States, George W Bush, were to meet. Similar to other current summits, this gathered massive social movement demonstrations, here joined under the common platform “Towards a different Europe”. Social movement activism is related as a

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5 ‘The social’ here indicates the enduring political perspective on meaning and action made up by relations constituted by articulations. It has a lasting character although no underlying essence.
6 This occasion has been more thoroughly elaborated in another article (Fridolfsson, 2004).
7 They are sometimes labelled the global justice movement, the anti-capitalist globalisation movement or alternative globalisation movement.
negative to a certain understanding of official, or even ‘real’, politics as being the representation and negotiation of interests within the liberal democracy. This almost obligatory presence of the non-official politics of social movement activism at contemporary summits is constituted relationally as part of the social myth of a transparent liberal democracy. The moments organising the global justice movement, as an occurrence of the ‘civil society’, are relational and differential to the institutional EU-project. It can thus be understood within the same system of differences, although as complementary to institutional politics. The recurring attempts to in beforehand, establish deliberative situations between the movements and the institutional political arena are constitutive articulations of such totalising order.

The dislocatory event at the summit was when three demonstrators got shot by the police, hundreds were imprisoned, when police and civilians were injured and material value for millions was destroyed. The dislocation resulted in a hegemonic intervention, filling the empty place of the universal, a hegemony where the social movement protest regains its proper place in the EU-project and the attached idea of liberal democracy.

A supplement, a radical outside, to the established order of EU-politics, which cannot be symbolised but are nevertheless labeled in all sorts of ways, are filling the gap so manifestly laid open at the summit in Gothenburg. The image is however not homogeneous, instead this radical outside, a deviant demonstrator, is overdetermined with symbolic investment. This condensed (metaphoric) fantasy-figure is granted contradicting subjectivities such as "unfortunate adolescents going astray", "upper middle-class spoiled kids revolting", "criminals missing a social context", “idiots”, “communists”, “Nazis” and “terrorists” (this last name which opened up a whole new dimension after September 11 the same year). The fantasy of the constitutive outside is taking many forms while heterogeneously filling in the blanks, compensating for the inherent lack in the idea of a sutured social. The diversified subjectivities of the deviant social movement activist broadens the amount of possible positive answers to the question of the possibility of the (intrinsically impossible) social. In this sense the deviating activist becomes a social symptom, filling the void, explaining to many why society doesn’t work.⁸ This way the structured totality (here the transparent EU-project), continually but in different fashions, is compensating for its’ lack.

The totalizing project further already knows about its inherent lack and produces the anticipated threatening subject long before the dislocation. This “fantasy [here the deviating violent activist] is a means for an ideology to take its own failure into account in advance” (Zizek, 1989:126) – the system’s fundamental self-blockage. Unruly demonstrations were already present subjects, heard of well ahead of the Gothenburg summit. The National

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⁸ Compare with Žižek’s discussion about the Jew (1989).
Security Service warned about this group of violent demonstrators attending the EU-meeting (SAPO, 2001). Many journalists also constructed worst-case scenarios in advance involving deviant violent demonstrators, and thereby anticipation, a tense expectation, jouissance.

A not very subtle exclusion mechanism at work when subjugating the failed totality to metaphor was dividing demonstrators at the summit into the categories of ‘good’ and ‘evil’. A journalist reported from the summit:

When the police closed off the Victoria Bridge in order to prevent hundreds of people sitting there to leave, no cloaked demonstrators could be detected and the police could no longer separate the good from the evil [my emphasis] (Grahn, 2001).

The evils are here made up by a fantasmatic crowd of people taking place among the respected demonstrators, a projection of subjectivities now paradoxically masked by showing their face. The metaphoric supplement of the deviant demonstrator is thus continuously present, despite deficient substantiation; it is in fact an already given identification.

Conceptual Metaphors and Demonstrations

The hegemonic intervention suturing the dislocation is attaching guilt to this collective of deviant activists through a number of conceptual metaphors. A recurring coherent structuring metaphor characterizing the alternative globalization movement’s protests at Gothenburg in 2001, was describing the protests as some type of living organism, PROTEST AS AN ANIMAL/A NATURAL PHENOMENON (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). 9 In this narration, a particular group of perceived deviant activists is often referred to as a ‘tail’, which is unambiguously attached to a non-pronounced animal’s body – the normal demonstrators’. Claims that “[t]here is a tail, for which politics becomes a mean to go berserk”; and, “[i]t is time to question the right to demonstrate when there is this tail [of violent demonstrators] that wants to crush anything that comes in its way”, are two illustrative quotes commenting the events. A variation on this theme is describing collective protests as a cyclical recurring force of nature, a historic and natural certainty: “There are always waves like this. There will always be youth that need to

9 Lakoff and Johnson recognise whole logics that come with a particular type of conceptualisation of words. They identify what they call coherent systems of metaphorical concepts, which in turn have a corresponding coherent system of metaphorical expressions to go with those concepts. In their presentation of these systems they use the most specific characteristic to represent the entire system (a type of condensation that is). For example the metaphorical concept of TIME IS MONEY stands also for subcategorisations that convey the same type of relationship between time and money such as determining time as resource, time as valuable, but also ways of expressing spending, investing, wasting or running out of time.
protest and become violent [...] this is nothing new in the history of mankind”. Demonstrations resembling swelling waves are also standard depiction. Rats and pigs were other names used as exclusion mechanisms in the discourse. Rejection and redirection of these interpellations among the demonstrators, constitutes an imaginary collective of deviant activists. Normal and abnormal forms of protests becomes reproduced categories through acts of identification like the repetitive dissociations from a pronounced “violent tail” also amongst the activists themselves. Few wants to belong to the ‘small group of violent deviants’, but they nevertheless become constituted as part of the very same large animal-like body, which embraces everyone despite the almost unison condemnation and detachment.

There is an ambiguity in the determination of who belongs to this supplement, the radical outside sabotaging the summit. The official Swedish Presidency web page reported on the Swedish prime minister Göran Persson’s experiences from the summit:

> It is hard for the President-in-Office of the European Council not to mention the riots in Göteborg when he summarises the decisions of the European Council meeting. At the same time, he is pleased with the real political results. “This is a historic moment”, says Persson, referring to the agreements made in the sphere of enlargement [my emphasis] (http://www.eu2001.se, 2001).

Here again no distinction is made between the riots and the non-official politics of the summit, anything outside the real politics are condensed to the metaphoric riot. The failed idea of ‘civil society’ and social movement activism as a phenomenon supporting a hegemonic political project becomes concealed through the return of a haunting supplement. The body cannot escape its’ tail, and the inconsistent field structuring an imaginary project of fully sutured transparent politics, the accommodating and transparent liberal democracy, cannot escape its own impossibility.

**DEMONSTRATION IS WAR** is another widespread coherent structuring metaphor subjecting alternative globalization protests in Gothenburg to otherness. These metaphors are so obvious and established that protest becomes very similar to war in the discourse. During the summit, there was a constant mentioning of “a feeling of war”, “the battle of Gothenburg”, “besieged city”, “guerrilla warfare” or “regular street combats” and so on. The persistent reference to ‘peaceful demonstrators’ also implies and enhances the antagonistic position of the rest, those who deal with the binary opposition – war. Further the news photography was charged with visual references to war aesthetics like people hunching down in the streets or frightened faces taking protection in a smoky environment. In a sense a photo is the ultimate metaphor with immense condensation of meaning. References to Gaza, the
Westbank, Nazi-Germany and other infamous trouble spots are also articulations of this conceptual metaphor.

Picture 1. Fire at the Avenue in Gothenburg.

If one considers my introductory characterisation of metaphor, this is not simply rhetorical assistance; we can never escape the workings of the metaphoric symbolism. Hence, the use of war metaphors establishes the plausibility for military intervention when dealing with
political protest. Unruly natural phenomena are also something that reasonably only can be controlled by forceful intervention.

The metonymic relation between violence, masculinity and protest becomes apparent in elite discourses and media reports on street-demonstrations. Women are notably absent as subjects in the discourse structuring collective protest taking to the streets. Studies however show that more women than men engage in new social movements and non-formalized political activity (Foweraker, 1995; Oskarson, 1999). Nevertheless, mainly men in these organizations become public figures representing the movements. Women do not seem to be granted the same space to act publicly and to appear as subjects within the discourse. Elena Semino and Michaela Masci argue in an article that Silvio Berlusconi’s usage of football metaphors in a political campaign has sexist implications. Not merely due to the fact that more men than women are interested in football, but also because the archetype representation of the football player remains a man (Semino & Masci, 1996). Translated into this discourse about political protest, the coherent structuring war and combat metaphors also connotes that the participants are men. According to Cynthia Enloe (2000), the militarization of civil areas marginalizes women. As a result, women are discarded as political subjects in the discourse structuring social movement protest.

Picture 3. Boy, girl, man or woman?
Demonstrators, even when disguised with a mask as in picture 3, are often nevertheless presumed to be male. In spite of uncertain gender characteristics, boys become a signifying metaphor embodying the activist in the discourse structuring street-demonstrations. The demonstrators are mainly made out to be aggressive men, alternatively boys, in news reporting. “In front of the library, when the windows at the bus-stop were already shattered, seven masked boys were grabbing pave-stones”, a journalist reported from the demonstration. Evidently the reporter could not possibly know for sure, whether or not these activists were boys since they were cloaked, but they were still articulated as boys in the discourse. Activists are further more often made into ‘rascals’ or ‘boys’ rather than ‘men’, possibly because ‘real men’ represent another type of masculinity. In a similar way the policemen working at the summit were men. Women are not policemen they are ‘women policemen’. Under a newspaper headline “Raped Gothenburg”, the text reads:

The assertion that we [the journalists] would be wishing for riots and violence is nonsense. Of course we do not want that. But we have to depict what is happening. When hooligans *rape* Gothenburg, when the Avenue is *battered*, and there are shooting in the Vasa Park, we absolutely surely write about it and we write a lot. Otherwise it would not be journalism, but distortion of reality [my emphasis] (Hjörne, 2001).

‘The raped city’ became a meaningful metaphoric conception that was repeated in many texts after this one. Here it becomes apparent that the idea of the activist is a man, as the concept of rape needs a rapist, who by definition is a man, presently a hooligan. The raped city is also an example of what Carol Adams (1990) would call the absent referent. In this case there is a raped city although the concept of rape is usually reserved for women exposed to sexual violence. Through the use of metaphor one area gets illuminated while hiding something else. In the texts on the ‘raped city’ the more common usage of the words ‘rape’ and ‘battered’ is weakened, and thereby conceals suffering among women exposed to violent acts carried out by men.

**Event Two – a Swedish Referendum**

Sweden joined the EU in 1995 after a consultative referendum in September 1994 where 52,3 of the participating electorate voted Yes to join the European political project. Since 1999 the EU has also been a monetary union (EMU) with the purpose to coordinate the economic

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10 There was an antagonist discourse available suggesting that the media was to blame for the violence and destruction, through their extensive exposure of the events.
policies of the member states. An official web page from the Swedish government also states that the purpose of the EMU is to “introduce and maintain confidence in a common currency” (http://www.eu-upplysningen.se, 2005). On September 14, 2003, yet another referendum took place where the constituency was to answer the question “Do you believe that Sweden should introduce the Euro as currency?” This time 56 percent of the participants voted No, a dislocatory event\(^{11}\) that immediately demanded organisation and structuring to become comprehensible.\(^{12-13}\) The result from the referendum did not agree with representations of a consensual EU-project and the meaning of the election outcome hence had to be characterised in order to fit the script. A hegemonic intervention thus established a discourse explaining the disturbing outcome. Political subjects do not exist as such prior to their representation, but are embodied as a metaphoric construct. A successful campaign by the EMU-critics nevertheless subjected the victorious No-voter to marginalisation since meaning of political protests is negotiable. Naming the protestors certain ways became more plausible than others after the election, and as a result a whole account of the social emerges (Laclau, 1996). A majority of the votes accordingly does not guarantee a privileged interpretation of what follows.

\textit{Scientific and Expert Explanation}

A team of political \textit{scientists} published a book investigating and “explaining” the election outcome (Oscarsson & Holmberg, 2004). Already in the preface a tone of surprise is determining the event. One wants to establish how this could possible happen:

\begin{quote}
The Struggle over the Euro [the name of the anthology] is the \textit{largest joint book-project carried out so far} by the Department of Political Science in Gothenburg. With 27 chapters and 24 participating authors we are proud to present a broad analysis on \textit{why the referendum about the Euro in 2003 ended the way it did}. In this anthology the main
\end{quote}

\(^{11}\) Political scientist Sören Holmberg appeared in a televised analysis two days after the election when asked to compare the results to the EU-election in 1994: “Return match. That time the home-team won, this time the away-team won […] the patterns are the same [in terms of the statistical device determining the ‘being’ of the voters, class, gender, whereabouts etc.] there is \textit{no healing process} if one talks about Sweden as a divided country” (Agenda, 2003). The statement literally articulates the desire for suturing the dislocated social.

\(^{12}\) In theory the Swedish \textit{Riksdag} could still approve to introduce the currency in the future, as was the case in the 1955 referendum about the conversion to right-hand traffic, something the electorate voted against. Sweden has had six referendums in modern time and they have all been consultative.

\(^{13}\) Mournfully, a mentally ill person murdered the Swedish foreign minister, Anna Lindh, in the last stages of the election campaign, three days before the election. There were speculations about what bearing this would have on the election result. Statistic analysis suggests it had no influence on the voter preferences (Holmberg, 2004). It however resulted in campaigning shutdown on both sides, and there was no televised final debate as customary.
actors in the drama are studied – first of all the voters, but also the parties, the media, campaigners and the members of parliament [my emphasis].

Obviously this is perceived as something out of the ordinary, something that this giant book-project in itself is an articulation of, and is also “staged” as a drama here. In fact it even gained biblical proportions as one of the authors writes, referring to the election, that “[b]ig usually defeats little. Even if this time Goliath, just like in the Bible, got beaten by David” (Holmberg, 2004:21). Chapters in the academic anthology titled “Lacking Anchorage”14 (Brothén, 2004), “The Impossible Loss” (Strömbäck, 2004), and “The Terminological Mistake” (Rothstein, 2004) implicitly suggests that there was a right and a wrong outcome in the election, or the least this was bewildering.

The anthology front cover, Picture 4, illustrates the no-voter as a women riding on an orange painted Dalahäst.15


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14 Referring to the diverging opinion between the Euro-positive members of parliament and political party representatives versus the majority of the electorate voting No.

15 These horses are popular wooden handcrafted souvenirs sold in the rural landscape of Dalarna, something that further enhances the backwardness of voting No to the Euro.
This humorous depiction is an articulation of metaphor, where the no-voter is condensed into a somewhat ridiculous political subject on a wooden horse trying to fight an armed soldier on a forceful European stud. The message is that there is little or no prospect for this obstinate looking girl-woman, using the Krona as a shield, to win the battle against the force of rationality. While using the coin as a protective devise, this also connotes a sense of regional protectionism, but even further it conveys the message that it is the currency in itself that is of importance to the No-voter. Among other things this hides the fact that No-voters may be against socio-political implications of the capitalist order that possible come with the EMU-project. Two of the chapters in the report are titled “Homefeeling” (Berg, 2004) and “Swedes, Euro and the Nationalism” respectively, attaching emotion and intolerance to the metaphoric No-voter.

City people versus the countryside residents became a popular division frequently referred to throughout the election. This occasioned a debate put on by the Swedish state television inviting two discussants to a morning News show announced under the rubric “Big cities says Yes, countryside says No”. Pernilla Ström, active in the Yes-campaign was asked to explain this tendency, and commented it as follows:

I think it depends on what type of contacts one has. If you look at the big cities, there are lots of connections outwards. I think it has to do with the industrial structure. While on the countryside you don’t have that type of flow, those types of contacts that you have in the cities. It’s natural then to be a little more wary, and think twice before letting in these new things that are a bit unfamiliar and what can be felt to be a little different. [my emphasis] (SVT, 2003).16

Again this statement reveals the inevitability of the development to come. It is something that needs to be “let in” and those opposing are emotional and worried about European intrusion due to rural isolation. The Social democratic Prime minister Göran Persson adopted this same discourse when commenting on the election outcome: “The worst is our new regional differences in Sweden now. These cleavages are frankly our new hell” (Aktuellt, 2003).17

16 Contender Göran Greider was in the same debate arguing against this narrative clinging to an antagonist discourse available, nevertheless marginalised, interpreting the election outcome in terms of class-belonging regardless of location.

17 The night of the election Prime minister Göran Persson was asked to comment on the election outcome in relation to statistical findings. “There is a class-voting surrounding the EU and the EMU-issue that we have to take utterly serious. This is something we have got to deal with now. There is a deep mistrust against the EMU-project [my emphasis]” (Valvakan, 2003). Here the antagonist discourse privileging explanations with a class-dimension is dismissed with attachment of distrust and suspicion. It is also articulated as something possible to fix – something needed to be dealt with.
"Women most negative to the euro" (DagensIndustri, 2003) and "Women most hesitant to the euro" (Brors, 2003) two major newspapers’ article headlines read reporting on the opinion polls before the election. These articulations are illustrative of the hegemonic intervention and make apparent the norm. It is not considered newsworthy to report on the men being positive to the Euro; the metaphoric women are the disparate subjectivity.¹⁸

The political scientists’ scientific account of the election results, truth-seekingly mapping out the ‘being’ of the No-voter, grapples with age, gender, whereabouts, EU-knowledge, voter-behaviour¹⁹ etc of the condensed metaphor. Their efforts of locating “human beings into types and categories, all necessarily divided from each other for distinct handling, treatment and consideration” are what Donald F Miller would call literalist (Miller, 1992:91). These condensations, like any metaphors, illuminate similarities despite dissimilarities; regardless the amount of categories used as explanatory variables. No authenticity can be reached no matter how many chapters written on the topic, the gist still remains and is also reproduced through articulation — the problematic outcome of the election. This meticulous search for the reasons to the No-voters’ victory is an articulation contributing to the idea of the EMU-project as the norm and an almost ‘natural’ step for a joint European project destined to come. This air of inevitability was also hinted in an interview with Prime minister Göran Persson in the Financial Times: “It's impossible for us to say no. We have only two options. 'Yes, we want to enter now' or 'Yes, we want to enter later'” (Dawkins, 1999).

While focusing on knowledge about the No-voters, these characterisations simultaneously constitute a reduction of possibilities, and other potential interpretations are concealed. This figurative drive to establish identity between dissimilar subjects is what Nietzsche would phrase “the will to power” (Sarup, 1988:46). Metaphors promote the opportunity to act in certain ways and make others unintelligible. Not only do these interpretations obscure other possible comprehensions of the No-voters, such as class-related, anti-capitalist and social-welfare protecting reasons for voting No to the EMU. As this hegemonic intervention names the No-voter with metonymic attachment, it also creates a chain of equivalence that hides the inherent lack in the social, i.e. a social myth, here constructed as an in essence unproblematic EU-project.

¹⁸ This is however momentous of women’s position in politics in general, where they are characterised by divergence from an invisible, though male, political subject (Eduards, 2002).
¹⁹ ‘Behaviour’ is a concept that moreover connotes conduct, manners and possible misdemeanour.
Chains of Equivalence and a Social Symptom

There are other ways than physical repressions to discard a political protest and also a majority of the electorate can be subjected to subordination. The relentless determination of the nature of the No-voter also symbolise the character of the Yes-voter as its’ opposite. All dichotomies have one privileged position where the privileged moment belongs to the masculine subject on a symbolic level (Sarup, 1988:109). The metaphoric no-voter subject can thus be illustrated with following metonymic moments constituting a symbolic chain of equivalence: Woman, naïve (lack of knowledge), rural and emotional. Its’ binary opposition is hence a metonymic chain of masculinity, wisdom, urban and pragmatism.

The EMU-referendum resulted in a dislocation, a trauma that needs to heal. Although, the fissure is heterogeneously rationalised as this discourse is not unchallenged. There are antagonist explanations for this social rupture, some that attach even less status to the No-voting metaphor. Such chain of equivalence would metonymically attach fear, intolerance, nationalism, regional protectionism and reactionary qualities to the condensed No-voter, which simultaneously attach the Yes-voter with tolerance and foresight.

The metaphoric No-voter hence becomes a social symptom, a residue disturbing the myth structuring the understanding of an inevitable merger of ‘European economic and political interests’. Discourses govern what we see and not even as we are aware of their existence (Cruikshank, 1999). Attempts to articulate the event as the result of a capitalist or imperialist critique cannot escape the idea of explanatory responsibility still focused on the No-voters’ behaviour.

Metaphor and the Study of Politics

In a western liberal democracy the most institutionalised form of political protest is going to the ballots. Nonetheless, as mentioned, political subjects do not exist in themselves as ready-made entities, but are the result of a temporary fixation made significant. Political protest does not have a meaning before its representation. Also a familiar and legitimate political issue can become marginalised in a discourse, for instance through naming the protest reactionary, regional or embodied by women.

Both hegemonic projects in my examples maintain a social imaginary, a myth, which organises political protest in particular ways possible to determine and characterise. In Gothenburg the hegemonic project inscribed the demonstration in a myth constituent of an accommodating and transparent democracy. In the Euro-election the myth supplies the
inevitability of the EMU and a destined European economic future. However, precisely these attempts to formulate a unified political arena, reveals the always-present conflicts and antagonisms imbedded in the social.20

This study of political protest has traced political and ideological construction of the social and also pin-pointed possible effects due to metaphoric exercise. Plausible this approach to the study of metaphor can be shown to be useful in other areas of analysis of the political. All language is saturated with metaphor. Since the use of metaphor is intrinsic to meaning, I find it rewarding being the focus of political investigation as also the expert knowledge of political scientists is dense with the politics of condensation and displacement. The examination of conceptual metaphors probematises the world and meanings we take for granted, so does the identification of discourses at work, and this, I would claim, is the first step towards radical political change. Only through metaphor we can imagine alternative meanings and ultimately different worlds.

Researching the ideological orders like I have, naturally entangles myself in ideological production, however, I see no way to engage outside the order of metaphor, because “[t]here is no opposite to metaphor – other than death, mental and/or social (Miller, 1992:88)”.

References


20 Although social movement activism and the institutional politics of the European Union are inseparable and totalising of an order, it needs an exterior to explain why society still fails and these failures are metaphoric and thus also negotiable. Condensation hence also contains the inherent possibility to regroup the metonymic chains characterising an event.


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